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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0885
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRATISLAVA 000251

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/17/2020
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [NATO](#) [IZ](#) [LO](#)
SUBJECT: MOD SPINS NTM-I RIGHT-SIZING AS WITHDRAWAL

REF: STATE 54925

Classified By: Ambassador Rodolphe Vallee for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Slovak MoD Frantisek Kasicky is spinning the return of five Slovak soldiers from the NATO Training Mission in Iraq as a withdrawal in keeping with the manifesto of the Fico government. In fact, the soldiers (three officers and two NCOs) were sent home after SHAPE determined they were no longer needed in NTM-I's evolving mission. Six Slovak officers continue to serve with MNF-I.

¶2. (C) In response to reftel, Post evaluates there is no/no chance of GoS consenting to deploy additional military forces to Iraq. The Slovak Interior Ministry has in the past indicated it would consider a request from Iraqi counterparts to send police trainers. We note that reftel requests such assistance. However, the Iraqi MoI declined to take them up on the offer and the issue has since lapsed.

¶3. (C) According to Slovak and USG contacts at NATO, NTM-I is moving into a "mentoring" phase and thus requires fewer personnel. Slovakia's NATO mission was informed by SHAPE that in conjunction with this, the 5 Slovaks serving with NTM-I are no longer needed. The MoD website on April 25 presented the removal of the 5 soldiers as a political decision, in keeping with a promise in the government manifesto to withdraw from Iraq. However, by April 26 the MoD website contained only a factual description of the awards the soldiers had been presented upon their return and a brief history of Slovakia's involvement in Iraq, without discussing why these 5 soldiers returned to Slovakia now.

¶4. (C) Following initial press reports, which indicated the original MoD line that the soldiers were withdrawn in keeping with the government's manifesto, FM Kubis's Chef de Cabinet (please strictly protect), told DCM by email that the portrayal of the soldiers' return as a "withdrawal" was a "stupid situation". "The decision came as a technical one from NATO HQ... but Minister of Defense presented it as his political decision in order to look nice in front of the big boss."

¶5. (C) DCM will be raising our dissatisfaction with the MoD's handling of this with the Deputy Defense Minister May 2, and Ambassador will raise the lack of prior notification or consultation with PM Fico May 3. We will continue to reiterate to MoD that their words are heard outside of Slovakia as well as inside, and that there is a need to be truthful about the situation in Iraq and Slovakia's participation.

VALLEE